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ABSTRACT

The role of the federal government in civic/citizenship education is discussed in this paper. A breakdown has occurred in former socializing institutions, such as the family and church, which have ceased to influence civic education. There is a need to reconceptualize the socialization process. Four factors that impede the socialization of responsible citizenry are the mobility of Americans, the depersonalizing influence of television, the impersonal political environment, and increasing reliance on technical inventions and mechanical solutions. The role of the federal government in creating better citizenship education is to serve as a catalytic agent to foster the efforts of community members, parents, teachers, and school administrators. Suggestions for improving citizenship education focus generally on the improvement of basic skills and an inculcation of responsibility. Programs would include improved knowledge of what it means to be an American, a sense of national community with a global perspective, and a revitalized sense of place. Curriculum materials would be gathered from the social sciences and ethical education and would stress a global and multicultural approach. Development of indices for national assessment of citizenship by the Citizen Education Task Force of the federal government is discussed. (Author/DB)

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KEY ISSUES AND PROBLEMS IN DEVELOPING NEW NATIONAL POLICY*

FOR CIVIC EDUCATION

BY

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This morning I would like to present some of the key issues and problems in developing a new national education policy for Civic/Citizenship education.

Historically, the American socialization process has resulted from the interaction of clearly structured, well organized groups who shared a sense of mission about the future of the nation as well as codes of behavior whose roots trace to common principles expounded in the founding of the new nation. America's strength, we like to say, was in her diversity. Communities were bound by religious beliefs, ethnic backgrounds, and strong family relationships. All of these forces, singly and in myriad combinations, had a pervasive and profound influence on the education of young citizens to handle the responsibilities of tomorrow. Pride of heritage, a vision of progress, and strong moral convictions provided a framework within which individuals could shape their own destinies in a context of social justice and the common good.

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With the breakdown of the old configuration of socializing institutions comes the need for a reconceptualization of the whole socialization process. The family, the church, the neighborhood school, local civic and community organizations have ceased to impact on the civic education of today's citizen in ways that inspire confident action. We have lost many of the old cues

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to predictable social behavior without replacing them with viable mechanisms for reaction to the new environment. America is in a period of transition and readjustment. A great lady and orator, Congresswoman Barbara Jordan eloquently articulated the dilemma of our transitional times in a recent speech when she noted that "We are a people in a quandry about the present. We are a people in search of our future. We are a people in search of a national community. We are a people trying not only to solve the problems of the present: Unemployment, inflation...but we are attempting on a larger scale to fulfill the promise of America. We are attempting to fulfill our national purpose: To create and sustain a society in which all of us are equal."

Let us consider some of the factors that impede the socialization of responsible citizenry and the fulfillment of our national purpose.

Mobility is one factor in the changing picture of socializing influences. The U. S. Census Bureau estimates that as many as one-fifth of all Americans change their residence every year. This is both a high proportion and a high rate of mobility, and it argues for something to replace the sense of community that gave immediate and identifiable purpose to the idea of civic responsibility in the past. Twentieth century Americans do not pack up their culture and relocate en masse. They simply move, singly or in small family units. The old community ties are broken. There is no migration: Just movement, motion without melody.

A second factor in the changing socialization scene is the influence of the omnipresent television set, the modern American's personal sensory deprivation kit. The trouble with the medium is that it is an incomplete educator. There can be no personal involvement in the message it conveys.

It deprives the viewer of the stereoscopic sights, fully dimensional sounds, and the taste, smell and feel of the action.

A third element in the new picture is the process of depersonalization that occurs to all of us when institutions no longer serve but feed upon men and women. Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote that "an institution is the lengthened shadow of one man." Today's institution, whether economic, governmental, educational, or social, is more likely to be a lengthened shadow of itself which consumes human beings for its own growth.

A great deal of activity is now taking place in the formerly sacrosanct field of research on the human brain. We are beginning to understand how very little we really know about the way man learns. The evidence to date suggests that human beings are very much a product of their surroundings. Deprived of the ordinary sensory cues, the individual reacts strangely: He is, literally, disoriented.

A concern of educators must be with the new political environment of today's American in the context of the entire framework of our huge, impersonal institutions of all kinds.

A fourth factor in the changing socialization process is the tendency of Americans in recent decades to rely heavily on mechanical solutions to all problems, from urban planning to agricultural harvesting to medical treatment and to collegiate dating. Computers are marvelous technical inventions which have eased uncounted burdens of work and pain for man. However, in the flush of our excitement over the speed with which these machines perform so many of our tasks for us, we have tended to assume that computers are capable of

reaching decisions and be a science, but politics is still largely an art. We need to take a fresh look at the balance of the arts and humanities in our curricula, particularly in those fields of philosophy and ethics that previously formed an indispensable part of the instruction of the citizen in the art and science of self-rule.

What is our national public policy, or do we have many state and local policies, in the field of Civic/Citizenship Education? If we have a multiplicity of policies, are they complementary? What are the historical threads of national purpose evident in Citizenship Education?

What is the appropriate role for the Federal Government in the field of Citizenship Education today? Should education for civic responsibility be primarily the concern of the formal school establishment? If so, who is to determine what constitutes citizenship education and in what format it shall be taught? Where is the dividing line between Citizenship Education and political indoctrination?

In the months ahead, OE's Citizen Education effort will attempt to construct a road map of Citizen Education activity, illustrating both the major highways of thought and some of the important side roads. The Federal Government will not dictate American educational policy for Civic/Citizen Education. Our role is one of leadership, to serve as a catalytic agent for improving the state of the art. It is you who are assembled at this National Conference, together with school administrators, parents, teachers, and community members who must work in cooperative, innovative ways to train each new generation to carry on the traditions and business of self rule.

To date, the most difficult question we have come up against is the definition of citizenship education. Although the entire morning of a

conference to discuss the state of the art of civic education held last December was devoted to a discussion of this term, and although much subsequent correspondence has continued the debate, there remains a lively diversity of views on just what the term signifies. If citizenship education can mean so many things to so many people, is there a common framework of ideals and principles within which to fashion an educational program that is equally acceptable and productive of good results in all parts of the country?

Citizenship is both a general idea and a specific reality. We are each participants in a cause larger than any one of us, and yet the kind and quality of each individual's participation is unique. What we seek in the attempt to define citizenship education is that body of knowledge which constitutes the common denominator of conscious participation.

Many individuals, groups, and organizations have long been at work to improve the educational content and pedagogy of civic instruction, and although each may work from a different perspective, it would be wrong to exclude any of them. Similarly, it is not expected that any new definition of citizen education will include every person's idea of what the term does or should mean.

In talking about parameters of citizen education, I am reminded of a passage from a book I read recently on the thing in space we are calling the "black hole", a phenomenon formed by the collapse of a heavy star to such a condensed state that nothing, not even light, can escape from its surface. The author, a professor of mathematics in Great Britain, writes: "As understanding of the world increases, ignorance also expands, for there are fresh problems which are exposed to view by the new advances. It is as if our known world lies on the surface of a balloon, with the unknown just on the outside

of it. As the balloon expands, so the known world increases, but so does the area outside it with which it comes into contract; our ignorance is simultaneously expanded."

The reason why a neat circle cannot be drawn around the concept of citizen education is the same as in the illustration of the balloon -- As the knowledge bases of citizen education expand, as on the surface of the balloon, so does the space surrounding the balloon, representing how much is still unknown. Personally, I find that a very exciting state of affairs. Life is changing, and education might be defined as the process which enables man to constantly adapt himself to an ever-expanding horizon. Life then is growth.

In fashioning national policy directions for new initiatives in citizen education, it is important to understand that the apparent vacuum -- and I emphasize the word "apparent" -- in the current social studies and civics programs is linked to the educational dilemma we are now facing with respect to lower performance in the basic skills of reading, writing, and math. Part of the dilemma has to do with grade inflation, part has to do with inadequate measurement techniques, and part may well have to do with fractured publicity on this complex subject. However, in the minds of most of us, I think there is little question that there has been an overall decline in performance in those areas that traditionally have been considered basic goals of education.

A part of the citizen education package, therefore, must be concerned with a new focus on these basic skills, for without them, additional components of an expanded concept of civics cannot be made workable. As Margaret Mead says, "It is not only that too many Marys and Johnnys can't write -- they cannot read with comprehension, add or subtract or divide with accuracy. And obviously this affects their ability to absorb information in any field they

choose for study." Dr. Mead offers by way of explanation the opinion that "teachers and pupils and parents have become dropouts from the learning situation."

The degree of emphasis placed upon the three R's cannot be quibbled about. We may argue about methodology, but in terms of content, we must all recognize that without a firm foundation in the basic learning skills - the ability to read with comprehension, write in a clear and simple manner, and compute accurately - the other branches of learning are suspended in thin air. Reading, writing and arithmetic constitute the trunk of the learning tree. As Commissioner Bell recently suggested, we must now look upon citizenship education as the fourth "R' of the basic learning skills of reading, writing, arithmetic and responsibility, for if responsibility cannot be learned, then the cause of democracy is lost.

Another point that I want to stress is that since citizenship education is inextricably entwined with the socialization process in American society, it is important that individual citizens from all sectors of American life, from business, industry, labor, home, community organizations, education and religion, government and the media, etc., all participate in the determination of what should constitute a new civics. One issue that has been cleared up as a result of this conference, there are more than just six sectors that have to be considered. As I mentioned previously, the only appropriate role for the federal government is one of leadership to serve as a catalytic agent or as a convenor to help bring representatives from these various sectors together. So as not to be confused with the discipline of civics education the citizen education task force uses the term "citizen education" for its policy development activities. There will be no new federal categorical program called

citizen education. We also use the term citizen education to describe our process of involving citizens from the various sectors to meet in these national, regional, state and local conferences to participate in the debate over a public policy for civic citizenship education.

One of our prime tasks is to help create a new interrelationship between the people and their government -- an interrelation that is believable to every single citizen. This should be one of the key missions of a new civic education. This new dynamic relationship can only begin to be recaptured by the conscious creation of an informed, dedicated and committed citizenry. Such a citizenry cannot exist through emotional commitment alone, nor in ritual appeals to flag and country. Such a new commitment calls for a new compact or civic covenant between the individuals and their government. This civic covenant will draw its strength from an educated public who understand the cardinal relationship between rights and responsibilities within the context of a democratic-republican form of government.

In considering the development of a new policy, we must not only think of American education at primary, secondary and college school levels, but also what should constitute a new civics education for the whole population. That is why the sectors such as labor and business and the media will be important in the development of a new civics education for the adult population. The mission of the Citizen Education Task Force is to provide leadership that will encourage citizen participation in the improvement of civic education at all levels of education through the cooperation of the educational community with representatives from the major sectors of American society. The end product or goal of this effort would include:

1. What it means to be an American through 1976 to the year 2000.

2. A new civic citizenship program for all Americans.

3. A new mission for the public schools.

4. A new sense of national community with a global perspective, and

5. A revitalized sense of place.

Our strategy for fostering a new policy for citizenship education, is to sponsor conferences such as this as well as future regional conferences, state seminars and exemplary workshops during the next two years. As we continue to conduct this policy study we will be attempting to draw the widest participation of citizens through such instruments as the Delphi process and through small work groups which consists of various sectors. The Delphi process is only one technique for getting people to think about the complexity of the issues and problems related to developing a new civics.

One important ingredient in determining the policy will be identifying indices that can be used for quantitatively and qualitatively measuring responsible citizenship.

We are currently in the process of developing a series of indices which include those citizenship education goals adopted by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Assessment. Once these indices are developed in a matrix, we plan to have them widely reviewed and considered in the regional and state meetings and workshops, as well as distributed to academicians and key representatives of the other sectors for consideration.

We have learned in our meetings during the last ten months that the process and content implications of a new civic education include determining what knowledge bases, experiences and skills are necessary for responsible

citizenship now and on into the end of the century. It appears at this point that what we are talking about is developing a civic education based on the repackaging of existing knowledge bases. One model for a new civics might be based on a core curricula.

Knowledge that is central to such a new synergistic core curricula might include the 3 disciplines and 4 concentrations that were presented in the special activities session of this conference, i.e., social sciences, economics and ethical education, global perspective education, and multi-cultural education.

Let me assure you there are no "quick fixes", grand solutions, formulas, or proposed laws for avoiding the complexities that must be considered in developing a new civics. The report of the work of this conference will be very useful, but let me dispell anyone's simple notions that it will be a panacea for a new citizenship education for the schools of America, or for civic education outside of the formal school setting. We are all citizens of this great nation, but in no way do those of us here represent the broad diversity of views and ideas that must be carefully and patiently considered in the development of a new civics program.

Many problems will be involved in developing and implementing a new civic/citizenship education core curricula. The difficulties commonly attendant upon any kind of educational change and advance, plus some special technical problems, will be encountered in developing a new civics program for the school. Curricula and syllabuses must be opened up to accommodate new subject matter or to repackage existing knowledge bases in a new way and suitable teaching materials must be produced. Teachers must be prepared for

new tasks, and in this field in particular, such preparation will necessitate not only mastering new bodies of information, synthesized in a new format, but also adapting teaching methods to new purposes. Any new approaches to civic education must be personally meaningful to students. Programs must be designed to teach competencies related to enduring tasks of political life.

Education aimed at developing an attachment to civic principles, to the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and the relevant attitudes and behavioral traits cannot be achieved simply by transmitting information or holding national, state and local conferences. The traditional range of teaching methods may consequently need to be broadened to include new ways of working and ever new teacher/pupil, parent, community relationships once we determine what are the necessary knowledge bases, experiences, and skills for responsibile citizenry. In this matter, methods and approaches, the general atmosphere of the school, the personality of the teachers, the respective roles played by teachers and pupils and similar factors are of paramount importance. The school, in other words, should be a place where the rights of all are seen to be respected and where each has the opportunity for direct experience in exercising rights and carrying out responsibilities.

If we hope to teach civic literacy then we must establish the conditions which provide the climate in which civic responsibility can be learned - at home, the school, the work place, and in the community.

As a first step, we must restore our belief in ourselves. We are a generous people so why can't we be generous and understanding with each other? We need to take to heart and to practice the words spoken by Thomas Jefferson:

"Let us restore as social intercourse that harmony and that affection among our citizens without which liberty and even life are but dreary things."

A nation is formed and sustained by the willingness of each of us to share in the responsibility for upholding the common good.

A society is invigorated when each of us is willing to participate in shaping the future of this nation.

In this bicentennial year we must begin to define the common good and begin again to shape a common future. Let each person do his or her part. If one citizen is unwilling to participate, all of us are going to suffer. For the American idea, though it is shared by all of us, is realized in each of us.

All of you have helped launch this new Citizen Education effort, and we hope when you return home that you will build upon your experience here. We look forward to working with you in the days ahead.

Thank you.